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THE STORY

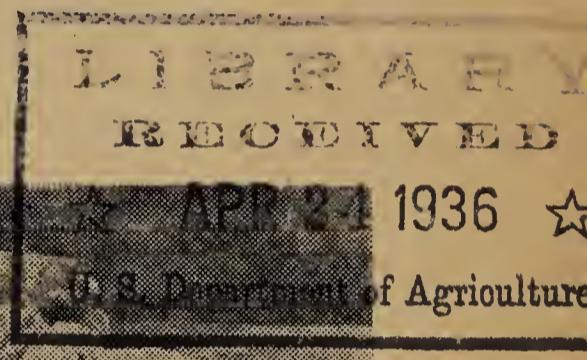
OF

Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn



The Highest Priced 85-Year-Old Corn

in the World



U.S. Department of Agriculture



This pile of Corn Sold for \$142.50—\$17.50 per Pound.

Cephas Atkinson, one of my daughter's great, great grandfathers, came to Ohio in 1812, while some of the Indians were still in the land. He settled in the Darby Plains near the center of the state, and in the 1830's, 40's and 50's before the railroads were built, he became a cattle buyer and drover, driving his cattle over the mountains to Philadelphia and other eastern markets.

At some time in his long life (none of his descendants know when or where), he came into possession of a sweet corn which I believe to be the very best in the world. There is no record whatever of its name, and not even a description of any corn with its outstanding characteristic, combined with its extremely high qualities, is found in any of the several recent histories of the development of corn as a food crop. It seems probable that Professor Essig of the California Department of Agriculture is correct, in his suggestion that this pioneer obtained the sweet corn from an Indian, or from some other pioneer who had thus obtained it.

I first became acquainted with the corn in 1900, when with Mrs. Bonnewitz I made a trip to the ancestral home of the Atkinsons in the Darby Plains. Here I met my wife's grandmother, the widow of John Atkinson who was the son of the 1812 pioneer.

Story of the Highest Priced Corn in the World

While eating of the corn which to me is sweeter, more tender and more delicate in its flavor than any other, I asked her the name of the variety and where she had procured it. She then told me of Cephas, the original Ohio Atkinson, who had obtained it before her marriage into the family in 1850, and also that during all the thirty-five years in which she had been mistress of the home, that she herself had gathered it and ripened the corn indoors, sometimes in unfavorable years bringing it to the warmth of the kitchen stove.

Her son William's wife, Mary Atkinson had become mistress of the old home in 1884, and Aunt Mary herself at that time told me that she had continued grandmother's custom of gathering the green corn and ripening it indoors.

I met also at that time another Cephas Atkinson, a banker, and a grandson of the pioneer Cephas. This grandson was younger even than my wife, who belonged to the next generation, being herself a great granddaughter. I was immediately attracted by the personality of this young man, and by that of his wife Alma, and on that day, a generation ago, a friendship was established which I value very much, and which I am sure will continue as long as we live. This cousin also had this corn growing in his garden, and we commented upon the fact that we had never eaten any other sweet corn which compared with it in quality, but neither of us at that time had any idea that there were no other plantings of this variety in the world.

Seed of it was given to me, and when I, like ninety per cent of all others to whom it had ever been given, had lost all my seed on account of failing to bring the ears indoors to ripen, then another planting was given to me. My own farmer failed to ripen a single ear of it in 1933, and when in the following spring I began to think that growing sweet corn might be more profitable than managing a department store or growing peonies, I wrote to my friend Cephas, sent him a dollar bill, and asked him to send me a quart of seed. He answered promptly, returned my dollar, and sent me a small box containing about four ounces of seed, and in his letter he said that he did not believe there was even a peck of seed of this wonderful corn in all the world. Of course this made me more anxious than ever to grow it commercially.

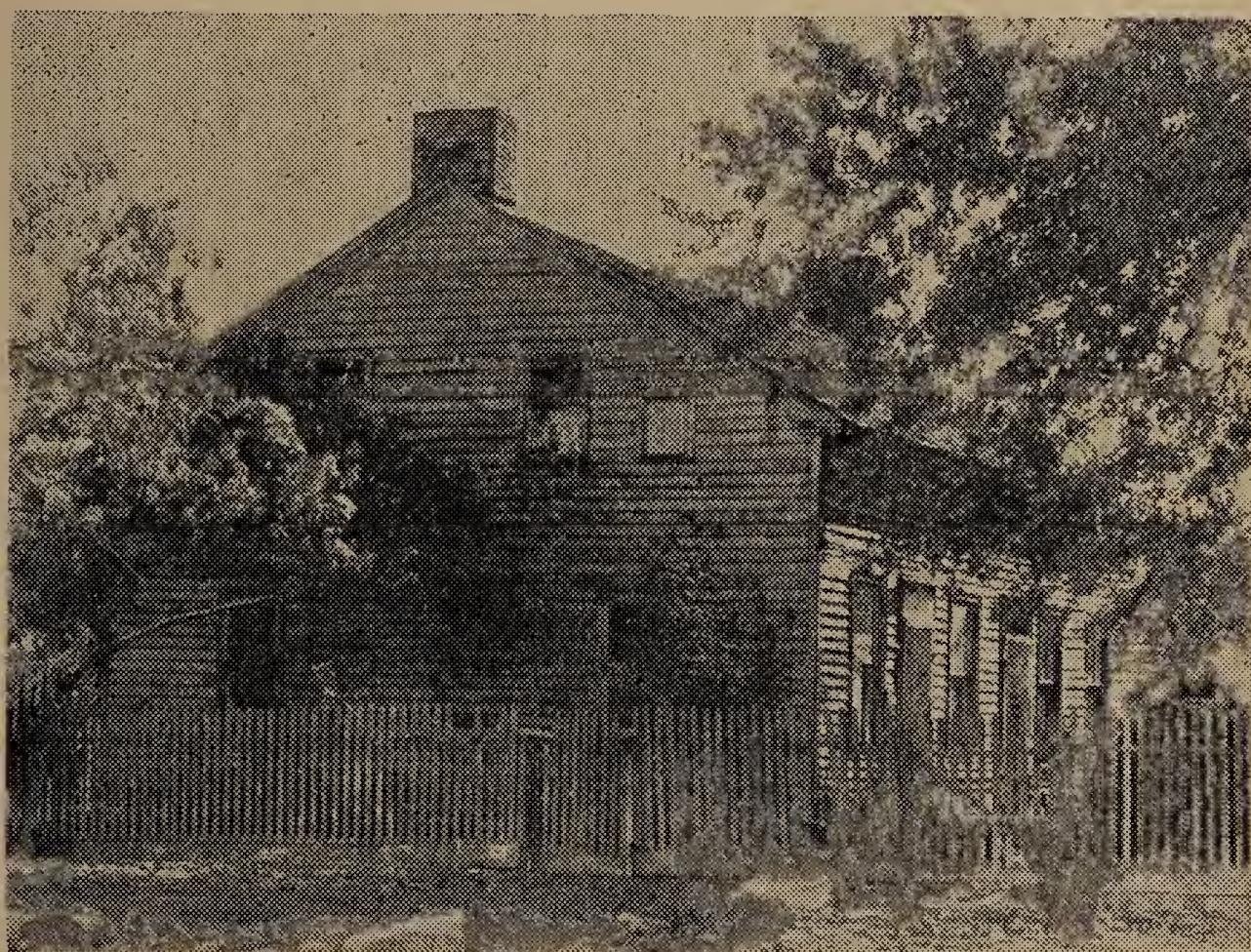
When I first received the seed, I had given my brother Van, a planting of it, and he quickly appreciated the quality and had been more careful than my own farmer in saving seed of it. When I told him of its scarcity, and that I wished to grow it commercially he very generously gave me two quarts of seed. He had given a planting of it to his neighbor, Luman Balyeat, who in his turn had given a planting to my friend, Jessie Vorpe, who I am sure was glad to be able to give me eight good ears of it.

One quart of my brother's seed I planted in newly plowed ground in my garden, but the drouth in May and June and

The Oldest Sweet Corn in the World

the great heat ruined it completely. The other quart I unfortunately planted on a south slope somewhat later in the season. When it was three feet high the terrific heat for more than a week caused it to wilt and droop every day, but each night it would freshen itself and endure the heat of the following day but the ears which matured on it were small, and the crop was very light.

The eight ears given me by my friend, gave me enough grains to plant sixteen rows each containing ninety-six hills. I planted this very late in June in my own garden and gave it my own personal care, getting a great thrill in the thought that I might be saving for the world, the most valuable corn in it.



This was the home of Mrs. Mary Atkinson who for fifty (50) years (1885-1934 inclusive) gathered this corn and artificially ripened the seed in the house, some times even bringing it to the warmth of the kitchen stove. With her permission I have given it the name "Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn"

My lot is an extremely long one and the rear of it is on the bank of a creek, and for years men and boys had used the creek bank as a short cut for destinations beyond my lot. As the ears began to grow in size, I realized the very great temptation that it would be, to hungry persons passing the tempting ears, to take a dozen home with them for dinner.

This corn was too precious for dinners even for the governor of the state, and so I went to a former gardener of mine, now past eighty years of age, and asked him if I could

The Newest Variety Sweet Corn on the Market

hire him to watch it for me. We quickly made a bargain, but he informed me that he could not look after it for the entire twenty-four hours. I went to another friend of mine who was three or four weeks out of the hospital, but whom the doctors would not allow to do any manual labor, and he was glad to assume half of the responsibility. I furnished these two men a tent, lanterns, chairs, and promised them a bonus if not a single ear was taken, and for two very good reasons, I am glad to report that the bonus was earned, and that the entire crop from the 1,536 hills was all gathered and every ear ripened in my own basement.

While my men were watching the corn I received a message that Aunt Mary was ill, and might never be able to plant another garden. Knowing that she probably had either a growing garden of the corn or some seed from former years, I made the one hundred and twenty mile trip to her home located between London and Plain City, Ohio, and found her extremely sick both physically and mentally. There was a long-term amortized mortgage on her farm, and within four weeks it was absolutely necessary for her to have \$142.50 to make the semi-annual payment, and she had no money at all.

I asked her how much seed she had of great grandfather Atkinson's sweet corn, and her son brought out a small metal trunk which contained the little pile of corn shown in the picture, and which I later found weighed eight pounds two ounces when shelled. She was delighted when I told her that I would give her the amount of money she needed for this seed which she had saved from her spring planting. I doubt very much that \$17.50 per pound has ever before or since been paid for a like amount of any variety of corn over seventy-five years old.

Fortunately her son had planted a large garden of it, and in October after she and her relatives had put up in cans, all they could use from the garden, and before the first frost of the season, I drove again to her home and gathered all the green ears which were still on the stalks. These I brought to my own home, where I ripened them in my basement, and when the next payment was due on the mortgage, I took care of it in payment of this green corn.

I tested every ear, and made a nice planting of it. It grew magnificently, and when the ears were ready for table use, I had my man load a small truck with it, and visit every grocery and restaurant in our city of 8,500 people. To every grocer, manager, and restaurant owner he gave a dozen ears of this corn, and to every salesman he gave a half dozen ears, telling all of them that it was "Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn," and that all of them should eat of it in their own homes. The next day he visited these business places again, and sold to eight of them the green corn to be placed on sale. The following day he sold sixteen of them, and at the end of

The Newest Variety Sweet Corn on the Market

the season we were regularly selling Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn to twenty-two individual stores.

Our season began August 20, and our crop was exhausted September 23, and in those thirty business days we sold over two thousand three hundred dozen ears of Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn at wholesale prices of from ten to twenty cents a dozen, in competition with Golden Bantam, Country Gentlemen and many other favorite varieties. In addition to our sales to the stores, corn lovers came to the farm and purchased this corn by the hundred weight for drying and canning.

I am publishing this fact, because I believe that a farmer or truck grower living near any town in the United States, can the first year build up as satisfactory a demand for Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn as I have done in my home town.

On account of the limited quantity, the price of seed for a few years will be higher than that of other corn, but one of our very live grocers told me that during the season his customers would buy from him no other sweet corn when Aunt Mary's was available. Another grocer told me that the quality of Aunt Mary's corn had increased his corn sales above the record of any other year, and still other, that his customers would pay an increased price for it over any other corn. I am sure you will agree with me that the first grower of Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn in any town will be able to out-sell his competitors and make a profit on the extra price he pays for the seed.

In Van Wert the seed will be on sale in different sized bags containing one eighth, one quarter, one half, and one full pound at all three of the seed stores: Campbell's — Gunsett's — Wilson & Girod's.

It is possible that later in the season I may find I have enough seed to sell it at wholesale to seedsmen in a few other towns, but now and until March, my main effort will be to sell it to commercial gardeners and to farmers living near enough to towns and cities to deliver the green corn very early in the morning to the local merchants.

If any reader of this article will send me the names and addresses of friends who are commercial gardeners, I will be glad to try to interest those friends, wherever located in growing Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn for market. We all know that every person in the world is vitally interested in food and also that the best foods advertise themselves quickly, as Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn has done.

I notice that I have neglected to say that I advertised my corn in our local papers, and I am glad to tell you that no food product was ever better advertised by the people who ate of it. Wherever men and women were congregated in friendly intercourse, someone was sure to remark upon the fact that Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn was better than any other

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and of course this was better even than newspaper advertising.

Tourists who stopped for a meal at our restaurants and visitors who were entertained in Van Wert homes often purchased the green corn to take with them to their families. Friends, acquaintances and even men whose names I do not know, seemed to take delight in greeting me upon the street or highway with the name "*Aunt Mary*" as if I were Aunt Mary herself, all of which I took as a tribute to the quality of Aunt Mary's Sweet Corn.

LEE R. BONNEWITZ,

Van Wert, Ohio



AUNT MARY'S SWEET CORN SEED

One-eighth pound bag (over 250 grains)	25 Cents
One-quarter pound bag (over 500 grains)	50 Cents
One-half pound bag (over 1000 grains)	\$1.00
One pound bag (over 2000 grains)	\$2.00

Postage Paid every where

